

Listening in on the Japan Christian Movement

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THE silence that separates us from Japan is broken by an occasional message regarding developments among our fellow Christians of that country. All news is liable to bias, both in the sending and the receiving. But with careful scrutiny and some imagination a fairly reliable sketch of present conditions may be attempted.

Sentiment throughout the churches undoubtedly supports the war, and Japanese Christians may be expected to do their share to try and help win it. Indeed, the course of opinion in the young Japanese Protestant movement has been very similar to that in our churches in the United States. At first there was pretty wide divergence of individual judgment, though not on as broad a span as with us. There have been no war-resisters. Also not a great number were extreme nationalists. Prayer for victory was cautious and restrained. The safety of the men at the front, the accomplishment of God's will throughout Asia, and the disciplining of one's inner life through the tragic experiences of conflict, these were the themes most often heard. But as the war-years went on, the churches moved more completely in step with the government policies and their statements of aims showed more unequivocal cooperation. Now, we take it, there are no discordant notes in the attitude of the Japanese Christians, and no suspicion of their loyalty to their own people or cause. Nevertheless many of them are heart-broken over the tragedy. Their world is in ruins. They are dreaming of the days of peace and reuniting ahead. The many instances of thoughtfulness reported by missionaries who returned last fall plainly indicate the persistence of friendliness and good will toward us on the part of both the leaders and the common folks in the churches of Japan.

Christian work goes on, and in much the usual way. The average church never has had a very ample program of work. But such as it is it is still continuing. The worship services are no doubt being maintained. Preaching is as free as it can be in any war situation. In Japan preaching has always been largely removed from any discussion of social or current issues. So there is now probably less change in the average sermon there than there is here among our churches. The withdrawal of missionary money aid seems not to have greatly affected the number or strength of the individual churches. On the whole the physical aspects of the Christian movement are as they have been. Sunday schools are probably having an up-hill time, particularly with the elaborated seven-day program of the public schools and the many extra community activities

caused by the war. Young men, of course, are getting scarcer in the church life. Women are without doubt busier than ever, working in and through the churches. There is much social work to be done. War casualties, bereft families, and needy neighbors will be challenging Christians to special effort.

Social service institutions may have trouble transferring their base for support from foreign funds to the Japanese community, but in most cases that will probably be successfully done.

The Christian schools seem to have made the shift to self-support without undue loss of efficiency and are crowded full. Men students as a rule have deferment of military service until college is finished. Girls' schools are said to be flourishing.

Inter-church organization is now quite thoroughly accomplished. In November, 1942, the united Church of Christ in Japan completed its first year with the discontinuance of the lines of the former constituent churches within the organization. The Episcopal Church (with the exception of a dozen churches under the direction of Bishop Yashiro in and around Fukuoka) has now been included. The first message sent out from that annual gathering stressed the ecumenical character of the church as the Church of Christ in Japan, not as "Japanese Christianity." Whether this statement reflects a reaction to pressure from official circles or from ultra-nationalist elements within itself, is a matter of conjecture, but in any case it represents a vigorous mood of self-confidence and of distinctly Christian mission. Perhaps the instinct of the church was right in selecting as its first Moderator, M. Tomita, who is a staunch advocate of religious freedom and of the rights of the Church in its relation to the State.

Theological education is progressing toward consolidation of the score of present schools into three institutions of training: one for men and one for women in or near Tokyo, and one for men in the Kobe region. We have not learned that this has actually been accomplished, but it is plainly the will of the church to simplify and consolidate its theological work. Needless to say, such a change would be welcomed by the government.

A revision of the Old Testament is said to be under way. This was reported with scare headlines, but is nothing sensational, since in Japan it has been considered urgent unfinished business for years. The New Testament has been twice revised since the first translation was made, and there is a call for still another revision. But the Old Testament remains in its archaic, out-dated style. Over a half

century of scholarship, too, is available and should be put to service in adding light to the meaning of the text. In recent years this has been one of the most pressing problems before the American and British Bible Societies. It is a long, arduous and expensive task, and has always been pushed ahead. The foreign Bible Societies with great generosity and understanding transferred their interests in Japan to a competent group of Japanese Christian leaders who formed the Japan Bible Society in 1938. The group at once began planning for Old Testament revision. In the fall of 1940 the matter was discussed in detail. It was then plain that there was some government influence being brought to bear to discredit the Jewish character of the Biblical literature as well as some of the more primitive portions said to reflect vulgarity, immorality and superstition. This was recognized at the time by the group as an evidence of unwarranted German interference with Japan's domestic affairs. They did, however, feel the need for a simplification and a reduction in the volume of the Old Testament books, in order that they might have a better chance of general reading. Also for years Kagawa and others have been urging a Farmer's Bible, consisting of selected passages. The work of revision, we understand, is now being taken up, though no one knows how far it has progressed.

Overhauling the Union Hymnal is also reported to be going on and this, too, was considered "next business" as much as three years ago. At that time the Hymnal Committee had already selected over a hundred hymns that needed editing. Church leaders, ever since the beginning of the war in 1937, have felt the need of some more spontaneous Japanese elements in the hymns. All of this, of course reflects the pressures and requirements of a war situation. The united church too, now that it includes the Episcopal wing must have felt the need of a composite collection of hymns known to both groups. Now, we take it, there will be but one book. It, like the Old Testament re-translation, may quite likely preserve in its strata for the study of scholars of future years some marks of the volcanic currents that we call World War II, but we believe it will not be unworthy of the Christian tradition.

The National Christian Council is now the liaison organ embracing all the Christian organizations and agencies, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, and also tying up with the similar federations of other religions.

An Inter-Faith Conference is reported as having recently been held in Tokyo. In 1912 the government, feeling the need of achieving greater harmony of outlook among the believers of the respective faiths called a meeting of the three religions. In old times the three were Buddhism, Shinto and Confu-

cianism, but now this latter is out and the young Christian Church takes its place as the third recognized religion. The hitherto ignored Christians were immensely gratified by this development and have since entered with enthusiasm into inter-faith activities. With the war the government renewed its sponsorship of united action. The Buddhists are looked on as the center from a political point of view. They have a certain universality and peace-loving tradition, but they are tractable and pliable, and for the most part have no pronounced political interests. The Shinto sects, however, are quite another matter. They are extremely nationalistic, chauvinistic and crusading. But in many instances their founder or head is a clever exploiter of the simple superstitious faith of his followers. Furthermore in several cases he (or she) has claimed a divine sanction for his message which impinges upon the place of the Emperor. So the police are always worried about the extreme right wing propensities of these fifteen or twenty million people in the voluntary sects of Shinto, and it is a distinct administrative advantage to have them now organized into the National Federation of Shinto Sects. It should be noted that we must not confuse this body with the State system of ceremonies at the shrines. State Shinto as thus observed and as taught in all schools is not a voluntary matter, nor is it dependent upon any inter-faith conferences. It goes its own way with the coercive power of the entire body politic behind it giving it, at least for the present, and probably as long as Japan shall fight wars, an irresistible momentum. The official view of Christianity in recent years has been that it occupies the left wing—not officially extreme, but containing some elements that always need watching. Its universal religious claims are trouble-making in their potentiality, and its historic stemming from the West, and particularly from the Anglo-Saxon countries with their individualistic and libertarian tradition, causes officials to be wary. It is to get out from under this cloud that the Christian leaders in recent years have moved toward center in their statements and public activities. Above all they feel they must be rated as true Japanese; rooting deeply into their national life in order, they hope, to influence it for good.

In 1940 the federations of the three religions came together under government "invitation" and formed a Three-Religions Federation. Notwithstanding the microscopic size of the Christian movement in comparison with Buddhism's fifty millions or the Shinto sects, the office of the National Christian Council was made the office of the Federation and the Council's secretary was chosen executive secretary.

Mohammedanism now constitutes a fourth religious force to be reckoned with by the expanding government of Japan. When in 1940 a mosque was

dedicated with wide official notice in Tokyo, and Moslem visitors from overseas were received with honors the foreign press took it as a joke. Today Japan has at least some control over the lives of upwards of a hundred million Mohammedans, and she knows that they are quite as unyielding and intransigent as Christians if handled tactlessly. It is of the utmost importance for some contact of a religious nature to be established. Also Japan wishes to be known as the sponsor of a united Moslem movement throughout Asia. Hence the significance of the Far-Eastern Mohammedan Conference which we hear was held in Singapore (*Shonan*) under the auspices of the Japanese authorities. We also read reports of inter-faith movements in Java and Celebes, probably similar to the Three-Religions Federation in Japan.

Overseas developments are following familiar lines. Wherever armies go, after the fighting stops there comes a time when friendly contacts are needed to supplement the routine regulation of civilian life. Where there is a considerable Christian native community the authorities naturally turn to Japanese Christians for help. One report indicates some sort of sponsorship of the Christian movement in the Netherlands East Indies by Japanese Christian leaders. In the case of the Philippines we have more direct information that Protestant ministers were sent from Japan by the military authorities to make contact with both the Filipino Christian leaders and the American missionaries and to smooth out relationships in general. A number of Japanese Catholic nuns also are said to have been sent to the islands for similar work.

Before condemning all this as un-Christian on the part of our former Japanese associates we may do well to contemplate the striking parallelisms with the developing situation in our country at the present time. Christian ministers and even former missionaries to Japan ~~who are now~~ in training or have already gone overseas for work in connection with the armed forces are generally credited with good faith and conscientious motives even by those who differ in their convictions as to the application of the Christian ethic in this crisis. Also, all believe that a Christian worker can often act as a shock absorber in rough situations where direct military contact may cause much hardship. We know of numbers of such actual instances in the present Japanese-invaded countries. Furthermore, in the case of Japan there is no exemption from some form of military service even for clergymen. There is no system of chaplains. A young man has to go and he cannot choose his task. So to some young Christian ministers these opportunities for liaison service must have seemed about the best that could be hoped for in an uncontrollable situation.

Missionary work on the mainland has been carried on by Japanese Christians for over thirty years. It has had its greatest growth during the past ten years under the devoted leadership of General Hibiki, a retired army officer of somewhat narrow faith but utter consecration to this particular task of evangelism. He seems to have been completely single-minded in his planting of churches and sending of evangelists all over Manchuria and North China. This work has now been organized under the name East Asia Missionary Society, and it is a part of the work of the Japanese National Christian Council. Three-fourths of the workers are Chinese, and the Japanese evangelists are as a rule well spoken of as faithful Christian men. It does, however, form a natural nucleus for bringing the wider reaches of the Chinese Christian movement under Japanese control, and that is what seems to be now taking place.

The re-organization of the Christian churches in Manchuria is reported from London fairly fully, so that we know the pattern. There has been a struggle of several years standing with the Scottish and Irish Missions over the registration and supervision of the schools by the Japanese authorities. Finally on the issue of shrine attendance, the Mission stood firmly and determined to close the schools rather than acquiesce. The government purchased the properties, and presumably is now operating the schools as public institutions. As the time came for the internment of the missionaries, arrangements were made whereby church and other properties were turned over to the native church for its use. Thus, though they still belong to enemy aliens and may be subject to confiscation or to other discriminatory treatment during the war, there is no evidence that this will take place.

The next step was the uniting of all churches in one body much like the Church of Christ in Japan, with its various departments operating under the direction of a council. This council is headed by Rev. Ishikawa, the pastor of the Presbyterian Japanese Church in Mukden, a man of acknowledged sincerity and good repute. The last reports indicate that the ordinary work of the local churches is going on about as usual.

The Chinese Christian Association of North China has now been formed. On October 13, 1942, 93 delegates representing all the Protestant denominations and Missions in North China took action organizing this association, which is in effect a united church. The constitution has now been received and a study of its provisions reveals no unusual features or evidence of improper government pressure. The stated purpose is "to unite into one association all of the Christian organizations of North China, and to undertake the apostolic commission of preaching the Gospel, according to the spirit of self-government,

self-support and self-propagation, so as to establish a united, indigenous church." The tie-up with the authorities is to be through a Provincial Office of Church Affairs set up in each capital with an executive committee responsible for all official contacts. With the exception of this feature and the somewhat over-elaborate provision for a complete system of theological training which may indicate the intention of government indoctrination, there seems nothing to cause apprehension in the published constitution of the new united body. In fact the pattern looks more flexible and free than that of the Church of Christ in Japan. A study of the personnel of the founding conference reveals that it included men of substantial reputation and influence among the Chinese leaders, and that the half dozen Japanese delegates were the pastors of Christian churches in the larger cities of North China and not irresponsible persons brought in for unworthy purposes.

The Chinese Church in an Age of Transition. In connection with the three avowed objectives of the new North China Association, it is significant that reports received at about the same time from West China bear witness to a deep desire for just those same three achievements among the church leaders in unoccupied China both now and in all future developments. The cutting off of funds from abroad is felt by many Chinese leaders to offer the opportunity for real self-reliance in the Church. The same is true of the acceptance of posts of responsible leadership by Chinese Christians as the foreign missionaries have been compelled to withdraw. The abrogation of extra-territoriality is taken very seriously by the Chinese speakers, and it is assumed that from now on the native church will rapidly accept the responsibilities of leadership throughout its work. The possibility of a nationalistic government prohibiting money aid from abroad is envisaged and many suggestions are being made for complete self-support. Church union, too, is one of the deep desires of the Chinese churches. Also there is increasing *rapprochement* not only with Roman Catholics but also with leaders of other religions in China.

Summing up the position of Japanese Christians today we may quote the words of an article written by Professor Hiyans of Aoyama Gakuin, Tokyo, in the September 1941 issue of *Progressive Christianity* (*Shino Kirisuto-kyo*), the very last bit of mail to reach us from Japan. It refers particularly to church union, but may be widened to express the general feeling in this total crisis. "This situation did not initiate within but from without. It was not done by us, but was given to us. There is nothing to do but accept it as in the providence of God and make the best possible use of it in the interests of His Kingdom."

Six Pillars of Peace

EDITOR'S NOTE: *We continue the series of commentaries by distinguished leaders of national thought upon the "Political Propositions" recently set forth by the Federal Council's Commission on a Just and Durable Peace.*

The Sixth Pillar

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The peace must establish in principle, and seek to achieve in practice, the right of individuals everywhere to religious and intellectual liberty.

All experience has shown that the best of laws can be rendered useless by poor administration but even poor laws can be made to work under good leadership and administration. The same will be true of the machinery to achieve a just and durable peace.

Thus, the most skillfully devised political machinery for peace will be no better than the purposes and capacities of the human beings who direct it. Police forces will serve to keep peace only so long as they are controlled by the forces of good will.

To achieve the basic objective we must recognize that, in the long run, peace rests on the implemented will of mankind. Essential to this will to peace are two fundamentals, first, spiritual faith which rests upon the dignity of the individual and equality among all human beings, and, second, sufficient knowledge among peoples, to provide continuous support for an organized society which respects the right to individual freedom.

We have found the spiritual basis for peace within our own citizenry. Here Protestants, Catholics and Jews, while holding vital and distinctive faiths, feel no urge to master and oppress others. Internationally, we see peace promoted by the sharing of great faiths by many in different lands. On the other hand, war comes whenever, as in Germany and Japan, a nation and race are deified and mastery of others is taught as a divine duty.

As Americans, we must be prepared to insist that any organization for peace shall fully, frankly and boldly require of all participants a declaration establishing "in principle the right of individuals everywhere to religious and intellectual liberty." Our whole experience and the history of this war have taught us that this is a basic necessity. It is right. It is in accordance with the most fundamental of human impulses to seek God freely.

But, as the Sixth Pillar also says, it is not enough to establish these rights "in principle"; we must seek to achieve them in practice. I am convinced that the peace will be only as durable as our success in achieving generally, religious freedom in practice. This will require strong leadership and stout resistance to compromise. But only thus shall this war end in a result worthy of the name of victory.

Having learned from this war the truly interdependent relationship between peoples, we must also learn that sound relationships must be built upon respect and independence. The interdependence of peoples does not require a system of international charity. We cannot